

Recognizing Carbon Monoxide Poisoning Symptoms

The bloodstream loves carbon monoxide (CO) about 200 times more than it loves oxygen. That means a victim of carbon monoxide poisoning has reduced oxygen to important organs like the heart and brain.

The only treatment for carbon monoxide poisoning is to replace the carbon monoxide in the victim's blood with oxygen. At a minimum, the victim will have to breathe high concentrations of oxygen for a long time to reverse the poisoning. In the worst case scenarios, victims must be treated in barometric chambers.

The best defense against carbon monoxide is to have a carbon monoxide detector in your home.

Sources of Carbon Monoxide

Carbon monoxide can leak from any of the following items:

- Gas stoves
- Gas water heaters
- Gas clothes dryers
- Fireplaces or firepites
- Wood stoves
- Gas or charcoal barbecues
- Gas or oil space heaters
- Smudge pots
- Gas or diesel generators
- Gas or diesel cars and trucks
- Motorboats
- Motorcycles
- Gas-powered lawn equipment

Signs and Symptoms of Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

The symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning are very similar to those of other conditions affecting the central nervous system. It's important to consider carbon monoxide poisoning whenever someone around the items listed above experiences any of the following signs or symptoms:

- Headache
- Confusion
- Shortness of breath
- Weakness

- Fatigue
- Dizziness
- Unstable gait (stumbling around)
- Nausea & vomiting
- Unconsciousness

Telltale Coloring of Carbon Monoxide

Unlike other conditions that decrease oxygen in the blood, victims of carbon monoxide poisoning are almost never pale or blue (cyanotic). Although it doesn't happen every time, victims of severe carbon monoxide poisoning will often be *bright pink* or *flushed red*.

Response to Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

If carbon monoxide poisoning is suspected, follow these steps:

Remove the victim from the area immediately! Breathing fresh air will stop the poisoning from getting worse.

Call 911. Treating carbon monoxide poisoning requires professional assistance and oxygen delivery equipment. If 911 is not available, take the victim to emergency medical providers.

Follow the first aid basics until help arrives.

Have a professional locate the source of the carbon monoxide and fix it.